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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the Broadcast Education Association's Model Curriculum Project and traces the attempts of the task force to develop national models. The focus of the paper is on mission statements, professional orientations of departments, and core courses. Though diversity is celebrated, the paper argues that model programs must grapple with how professionally oriented they see their mission and how they define what is fundamental about the field through core courses. The paper concludes by presenting questions arising from a second project as an alternative way of framing the dialogue about model curricula. Sixteen references are attached. (Author/KEH)

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The Broadcast Model Curriculum Project: Developing National Models

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The Broadcast Model Curriculum Project:

Developing National Models

ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the Broadcast Education Association's Model Curriculum Project by focusing on mission statements, professional orientation of departments, and core courses. Though diversity is celebrated, it is argued that model programs must grapple with how professionally oriented they see their mission and how they define what is fundamental about the field through core courses.

As a postscript, questions from a second project are presented as another approach for stimulating dialogue.

The Broadcast Model Curriculum Project:

Developing National Models

My charge today is to talk about the Broadcast Education Association's Model Curriculum Project and the attempts of our task force to develop national models. Since curriculum is such a broad topic and there is a time limit, I will emphasize three parts of the curricular equation: Mission statements, professional orientation, and core courses.

In April, 1988, as the new chair of the BEA's Courses and Curricula Committee, I created four task forces to continue with the objectives of the committee. For years the committee had sponsored a successful model syllabus project where syllabi for various courses were developed as an aid to teachers. It was my feeling that a similar program should be started for curricula to aid administrators who were creating, evaluating or revising programs. Charles Warner, who is at the University of Missouri School of Journalism, was appointed the first facilitator of the task force.

Our first step was to try and determine what people were doing in the programs that were "out there." We identified nine key questions for our survey of BEA's four-year colleges and universities:

(1) existence of department mission statements,

(2) types of degrees offered, (3) department professional

orientation, (4) number of sequences offered with departments, (5) types of sequences offered, (6) number of different courses offered, (7) number of core courses, (8) types of core courses, (9) names of elective courses. (Warner & Liu, 1990)

The survey was distributed by Warner, and his student Yu-Mei Liu, to 258 schools. One hundred twenty-eight schools responded. The findings were just published in the Summer, 1990 edition of Feedback. I will allude to these findings in my discussion about mission statements, professional orientation, and core courses.

Mission Statements

I'm sure it comes to no surprise to you that there is no one model curriculum in broadcast, speech or mass communication. That being said, there seem to be, for a variety of reasons, departments or programs that can be identified as models or exemplars in terms of their educational philosophy. In the BEA task force survey, Warner and Liu (1990) found that departments in

> Large schools have a higher percentage (55.8%) of mission statements than medium (46%) or small (40.7%) schools do. State schools have a higher percentage (51.6%) of mission statements than private ones (42%) do. (p. 6)

I was surprised at the low percentage of schools being identified as having mission statements. Departments might argue that they have implicit mission statements or that no matter what the mission statement says, it is the faculty, courses and facilities that define a program. Though I am sympathetic to

these viewpoints, I argue that explicit mission statements should be at the center of the discussion about model curricula. Well-conceived mission statements provide vision and focus for a department. They can be guideposts that hint at where a program's been and firmly point the direction they are going. They should, among other things, take into account the college or university that houses the department and the history and resources of the department.

So, a model curriculum would need to be anchored with a clear mission. But what do you put in a mission statement? For broadcast education and, more broadly, for mass communication education, one of the things that needs to be addressed in the mission statement is the "professional" orientation of the department.

Professional Orientation

Besides the survey, the BEA's Courses and Curricula committee created an advisory council to help us get feedback from practitioners about what they thought we needed in a model curriculum. During the initial meeting of the advisory council in April, 1989, the practitioners voiced the need for our students to get a broad background in their undergraduate education.

In broadcast education, what has been called the liberal arts vs. professional debate, goes back many years. In 1947-48, when Judge Justin Miller, who was then President of the National Association of Broadcasters, called a meeting between leaders in broadcast education and industry representatives, the consensus

on basic premises included:

> (1) that an overemphasis on the trade, or skill, aspect of broadcasting was undesirable; (2) that a sound liberal arts program should constitute the heart of the degree program. (Head & Martin, 1956-57, p. 41)

In other words, broadcast education was expected to be true to both the industry's needs and liberals arts education. Trying to straddle the philosophical fence between professional training and the liberal arts is probably why 32 of the 41 schools that responded to a 1961 survey question on philosophical approaches put themselves in a category that called for a "...broad liberal arts background plus professional training for 'first job skills' and a basic knowledge of the industry." (Niven, 1961, p, 248) These schools in 1961 put themselves in a middle position between the industry and the university.

In the study developed by the BEA Courses and Curricula Committee task force the question about professional orientation was stated differently. "Respondents were asked to select their department's orientation based on the following scale: Professional (5) (4) (3) (2) (1) Theoretical." (Warner & Liu, 1990). Forty-six percent rated themselves more professional than theoretical ("4" or "5"), 38% rated themselves in the middle ("3"), while approximately 15% rated themselves more theoretical than professional ("2" or "1").

In retrospect, I wish we had asked the question differently. I no longer see the concepts "professional" and "theoretical" as being bi-polar. Perhaps it would have been better to ask

departments to define their programs by the amount and kind of courses that fit into one of the three following categories: (1) courses that train students for "entry-level" positions in the trades, (2) courses that study the industry so that students can "fit into" the industry, (3) courses that critique the industry so that students can be an informed public? Perhaps it is the mix of these three types of courses that is the clear indicator of a program's philosophy? Of course, teachers may see their courses fitting into more than one category.

It might have been better if we had asked for a department's philosophy in relationship to the college or university housing the unit. For example, there seem to be at least four, broad, different kinds of "department/university combinations":

1. The professional program within the professional or trade school environment. There is no doubt that the mission of this department is job training.

2. The professional program within the "liberal arts" environment. Some of these programs might consider themselves as being liberal arts programs because they offer strong professional courses in their department <u>but require</u> "liberal arts" courses outside the department. These departments seem to reflect what was called for in the 1947-48 broadcast education statement: "...that a sound liberal arts program should constitute the heart of the degree program."

As a sidenote, Blanchard and I (cf. 1985a, 1985b, 1988a, 1988b, 1990) have suggested on numerous occasions that "professional" programs need to take a more critical stance towards the industries they serve and see themselves more as

preparing a literate public than simply training practitioners. Their argument has implications for accreditation which looks at the "liberal arts" occurring outside the mass communication unit. Accreditation needs to take into account the liberal arts component of mass communication study.

3. The "liberal arts" department within the professional or trade schools environment. English or speech departments sometimes have mandates to provide the liberal arts "component" within the trade school environment. I am not aware of any broadcasting programs that find themselves with this mission.

4. The "liberal arts" department housed within a liberal arts and sciences university. This department might see its mission as nonvocational in the traditional sense of preparing people for jobs in the industry.

An example of the philosophic differences between the professional orientation articulated by position 2 above and a position that my be reflective of position 4 above was articulated in the mid-sixties in a dialogue of articles that developed in the Journal of Broadcasting between John H. Pennybacker, who at the time was Executive Secretary of the Louisiana Association of Broadcasters, and Assistant Professor of Speech at Louisiana State University, and Charles M. Woodliff, then Assistant Professor in the Department of Radio-Television-Film at the University of Denver.

In his articles, Pennybacker (1965a, 1965b, 1965c, 1965-66) perceived a direct link between the broadcast industry and broadcast education. He ends his first article by quoting one of

the primary goals of the former Association for Professional Broadcasting:

> encouraging and maintaining in colleges and universities professional broadcasting education that will produce such men and women as can command the respect of the colleges that graduate them and the industry that employs them. (1965a, p. 187)

As might be expected this is similar to the present Broadcast Education Association goals:

> The Broadcast Education Association was established in 1955 to promote better understanding and working relationships between the college and university faculties who teach communications and the broadcasters who ultimately employ their graduates. (BEA Goals Statement)

Woodliff's (1965) heated answer to Pennybacker was that as teachers in the university "...our professional obligation is to breed dissatisfaction with the status quo among our graduates. We must widen the academic gap between commercial broadcasters and the schools." (p. 329; also see 1965-66, and Davlin, 1965).

When talking about professional orientation, perhaps we need to talk about a department's "ethos" or culture more than its philosophy. Maybe we need to be talking to students. Are the "student stars" the "worker bees" of the media centers (i.e. television centers, radio centers, newspaper centers, etc.) or are they the ones who win undergraduate and graduate paper competitions? Are our students moved by the great questions concerning the media and their impact or questions about the latest sound effects library? What drives the students? What

interests the faculty? How does a department want to spend its precious teaching time?

So what does this mean for the model curriculum project? Model curricula can be developed from a variety of professional orientations. What becomes evident is the clear, explicit enunciation of the orientation. A mission statement is one place to state professional orientation. The faculty, the courses and curricula, and the expenditures of time and money are ways of operationalizing that orientation.

Core Courses

Requiring core courses is putting your resources where your philosophy is. As Blanchard and I wrote in 1985, "Most of us would argue that our discipline is basic. But can we explain what is basic about our discipline" (p. 28-29). Core courses are one way of demonstrating what is basic, what is fundamental about our discipline. Requiring core courses is one way of working toward outcomes that are stated or implied by mission statements and professional orientation. Our BEA Task Force thinks it is a good place to put our energies over the next two years. It is a way of talking about what is fundamental for our students. Warner and Liu (1990) noted that

> more than half of the 128 schools offer between two and six core courses. This situation is especially the case with large schools (67.3% required between two and six core courses). There was great diversity in the number of required core courses and no pattern in the data was discerned. (p. 7)

They found that 35% of the schools required "Introduction to Media" while over 25% required "Media Law & Regulation" and "Introduction to Broadcasting."

In April 1990, the Courses and Curricula Committee sponsored a Town Meeting at the BEA convention where pro and con positions were articulated about having core courses, keeping in broadcast announcing, communication theory, research/statistics, and broadcast sales. To our initial surprise, the audience voted to keep in all the courses. This helped us realize that what is critical to determine is not what courses might be offered, but what courses should be required. We wonder if there can be agreement among the different professional orientations about what should be in the core. (A question for the future is whether there can be agreement about how core courses should be taught).

Our task force will be "sponsoring " a series of position papers that will argue either a pro or con position for including a certain course in the core. The first course to be argued is "Communication Law."

Let me add, that from my experience, it is not easy to maintain, sustain, and retain core courses. Entropy is probably no more evident than with core courses. Many times faculty don't want to teach the courses, students feel unfairly obligated to take them, and administrators sometimes regret having to staff all the sections. Questions that need to be answered in all courses somehow seem exaggerated for core courses. For example, there are philosophical questions, like what should be in the

courses? There are pedagogical questions like how should the course be taught? Or, should the same text be required for all sections? And, there are administrative questions like who should teach the course? Or, should all the lectures be on television? Answers to these questions can come partly from establishing the centrality of the core. If it is important. If it is central to all mass communication students, then a department's best resources should be aimed at developing the best core possible. Not easy, but possible and ultimately desirable.

Again, though core courses provide unique challenges to a department, they are one way of defining what we think all our students need to know. This is why, as a continuation of our initial steps, the Broadcast Education Association's Model Curriculum Project is concentrating on core courses as a way of inferring philosophies and mission statements. As a sidenote, another task force in the Courses and Curricula Division (it changed from a Committee to a Division in 1990) is developing a model syllabus for the "introduction to the discipline" class.

Postscript

It can be argued that the Broadcast Education Association's Task Force, by definition, is limited in scope. It does not necessarily take into account broader (mass communication) and narrower (journalism) definitions of our field. Therefore, I wanted to bring to your attention a project Bob Blanchard and I (under contract) are working on. We are looking for exemplars but we have defined what we are researching slightly differently.

Specifically, we are concerned with five areas of a program: (1) the major, (2) the general education or common curriculum, (3) the electives, (4) professional programs in general, and (5) the relationship of a program to practitioners.

In terms of the major, we are interested in programs that developed from different disciplines (e.g., English, Speech, Theatre, Mass Communication and Journalism). As part of the common experience (i.e. common curriculum), we want to know how mass communication programs have provided leadership for the common curriculum in the areas of social science, humanities, performance/production (e.g., writing), and interdisciplinary courses. We are interested in identifying programs that are built with electives without having a department or major dedicated to media studies. We want to see how other mass communication programs make linkages to other professional programs in their universities like education, business, engineering, and computer science. Finally, we are interested in the "tricky" business of making alliances with practitioners. How are internships run? Do media/advisory boards work?

To help us with finding exemplar programs, we sent questionnaires to administrative heads at a variety of programs. Let me end my talk by leaving you with the ten questions we asked. These questions are presented as another way of framing the dialogue about model curricula:

1. During the 1980s a great deal of criticism has been focused on higher education. As a result of this criticism, and for other reasons, some schools have been through extensive undergraduate curricular revisions. Has your academic unit

revised its undergraduate curriculum over the last ten years? What forces motivated the revisions? How much were the revisions based on internal (administration, etc.) pressures and how much on external (perceptions of professional needs, etc.) pressures?

2. Undergraduate education has been under pressure to get "Back to the Basics" of liberal education. How has your program defined itself in terms of what is basic or fundamental to a liberal education and what is basic and fundamental to our discipline? What kind of commitment has your department made to the liberal education of all students?

3. Though it is difficult to generalize, we are interested in your approach to new hires. What are the trade-offs you make between professional experience, research expertise and teaching; trade-offs between those coming out of a practitioner's background and those coming out of an academic background? Of course actual hires depend on lots of intangibles like personality and availability of candidates, but we are interested in what you look for when you begin looking through resumes.

4. How is your academic unit perceived on campus by the faculty and by the administration? Are you considered intellectual leaders in communication and media studies? Are you considered leaders in the liberal arts? Do you consider it important to be considered campus leaders in media studies and/or the liberal arts?

5. Both the Carnegie Foundation and the Association of American Colleges reports outline desired outcomes for undergraduate education. Labeled, in one case, "essential

undergraduate experiences" and, in the other case, important "capacities," they are authoritative guidelines of what undergraduate liberal education should "produce" in its graduates. Have your faculty developed outcomes for the student who majors in your academic unit? If so, what are they?

6. Specialties and sub-specialties can be developed ad infinitum within an undergraduate curriculum? But, there are limited resources. How do you balance the breath and depth issues within your curriculum? How do you ensure that undergraduates have an understanding of the scope of our discipline while giving them the opportunities to develop expertise in specific areas? Which areas, courses, or experiences do you think are essential to your program?

7. Communication and media studies programs exist in the world of the academy while being linked to an industry and profession. How does your program balance the world of the academy and the world of the practitioner? Does your program fit in one world more than the other? What kinds of professional ties does your academic unit nurture? If the job preparation function of your curriculum were taken away, which courses would remain? How does the professional vs. research-oriented faculty controversy play out in your academic unit? Or, if that's not an issue, how does the professional vs. liberal arts controversy play out?

8. New technologies and the new uses or re-configurations of older technologies continue to change the content and processes of mass communication. This challenge creates opportunities for re-defining what we teach and how we teach it.

How are these changes addressed in your curriculum? Which new technologies should be taught? What is it about communication technologies that should be taught and learned? Have you developed new courses, new sequences, new orientations? Have you re-named yourself lately? Which kinds of courses (ex. writing courses, production courses, etc.) are most impacted by the technological revolution and how have they been impacted?

9. Due to the integration of communication theory where intra-personal, interpersonal and mass communication are seen as integral parts of the same on-going process, what bridges are there among the various communication departments on your campus (ex. speech, broadcasting, journalism). Has the bridge building worked? What are the pedagogical and political strengths and weaknesses of such linkages?

10. How do you do <u>one</u> <u>or</u> <u>more</u> of the following:

a. Give your students a "conceptual communication map" that places intra-personal, interpersonal, group, organizational and/or comparative communication systems in the context of broader historical, legal-ethical, institutional, political, social, economic and other social systems?

b. Present media writing and speaking capability

c. Present information gathering

d. Present technological literacy -- understanding of visual, aural and computer "grammar and phenomena" in media.

e. Present the history and tradition of the field, the field's social and economic implications and the ethical and moral issues to be confronted?

f. How do you answer critics who say that teaching skills courses at the university level is not appropriate?

Let me close by re-affirming that the BEA model curriculum project and the project I am working on with Blanchard expects and celebrates diversity. What we are after are programs that are the best of their type. Will we all ever agree on one model curriculum? I hope not. Will the BEA task force be able to identify a range of curricula that follow clearly stated missions based on different philosophies? I think we can. Will the task force be able to answer everyone's questions about curriculum? No, but we hope to be able to keep the discussion front and center as media and media education continue to be transformed from forces within and outside the academy.

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